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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of Failure Free Reading, a program with the primary goal of providing a basic understanding of the reading process to students in grades K-12 with pronounced reading difficulty and move them into traditional reading programs. The program is targeted to and most effective with at-risk and English as a Second Language students, those with severe learning difficulties and others in the lowest reading percentiles. All students are expected to learn to read from meaningful material from the beginning of the program, regardless of prior reading ability. Failure Free does not deny access to any student and does not discontinue the program for any student for any reason other than successful transition from the program. Failure Free integrates facilitator-directed classroom instruction, talking software, and instructional print materials. Facilitators can be teachers, assistants, or noncertified tutors. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy, and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (SR)

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Failure Free Reading

Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness
Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations
Policy Issues and Questions - Resources

Topic or Category: Reading
Grade Level: K-12
Target Population: At-risk, Special Education, Limited English students

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

Failure Free Reading was developed by Joe Lockavitch, educational researcher, in 1982 and became available commercially in 1988. The program is targeted to and most effective with at-risk and English As a Second Language students, those with severe learning difficulties and others in the lowest reading percentiles. Failure Free is based on research that supports the use of (a) adequate repetition, (b) simplified sentence structure and (c) meaningful story content to teach or improve basic reading skills. The program is designed to complement other reading programs, approaches and learning styles. Failure Free integrates facilitator-directed classroom instruction, talking software and instructional print materials. Facilitators can be teachers, assistants or noncertified tutors.

The developer estimates that Failure Free Reading is being used in more than 7,000 classrooms nationwide.

Philosophy and Goals:

The primary goal of Failure Free Reading is to provide a basic understanding of the reading process to students with pronounced reading difficulty and move them into traditional reading programs. All students are expected to learn to read from meaningful material from the beginning of the program, regardless of prior reading ability. Failure Free does not deny access to any student and does not discontinue the program for any student for any reason other than successful transition from the program.

Program Components:

To accomplish its goal, Failure Free Reading uses age-appropriate materials, promotes independent reading, applies a consistent approach, uses repetition and provides immediate performance feedback. Failure Free reading includes the following program components:
Adequate Repetition: Reading exercises incorporate repetition of words to help students master pronunciation and increase vocabulary.
Simple Sentence Structure: Materials are written in the easiest and most predictable sentence structures. Most are simple, declarative sentences with the use of inverted phrases, dependent clauses and complex sentences reduced.
Meaningful Story Content: Each new piece of information is a logical extension of the preceding material. Figurative language is kept to a minimum, and the stories are about concepts students can understand. Each level of Failure Free Reading is written with an age-appropriate content.
Diagnosis and Assessment: Student growth is measured by criterion-referenced tests in silent reading and word recognition. A talking software assessment program, the *Diagnostic Prescriptive*, places students in the proper Failure Free Reading material. All programs include data management components that enable teachers to track student progress from pretest to post-test.

Software: Joseph's Readers is a multisensory, talking software correlated with the Failure Free print materials. *Verbal Master* is an accelerated vocabulary software program designed to increase students' receptive and expressive vocabulary.

Students participate in daily instructional periods with a trained teacher, teaching assistant and/or volunteer. All lessons are scripted and available in print or software. Lessons consist of the following exercises: (a) preteaching oral language, (b) teacher-led guided instructional reading, (c) independent print-based practice lesson and (d) talking software.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Several developer-conducted evaluations show significant gains by students in the lowest reading groups in silent reading and word recognition, as well as gains on standardized assessments. One independent study found significant gains on most measures, with mixed results for 2nd-grade students who participated in the study. Individual school data also show consistent improvements for students with severe reading difficulties.

Evaluations/Studies:
1. Some 235 elementary students, referred by classroom teachers as being at risk for reading difficulties, participated in Failure Free Reading as part of a districtwide Title I program. Ninety-one students were included in the initial program implementation, 144 in a replication sample the following school year (Lockavitch, Morgan and Algozzine, 1999). Data from the statewide standardized testing program were gathered after participating for two years in Failure Free and after students had completed districtwide 3rd- and 4th-grade end-of-grade testing. Performance levels on the standardized tests were compared for each group for two years (Level I = below 25th percentile, Level II = 26th-50th percentile, Level III = 51st - 75th percentile). Levels of performance (Reteach, Practice and Apply) on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) also were compared. The findings included:
Students made significant gains on the statewide standardized tests.
In the initial study, 33% of 3rd and 4th graders remained at Level I on subsequent measures of end-of-grade testing, 28% remained at Level II, 11% moved from Level II to Level III, 17% moved from Level I to Level II or Level III, and 11% dropped from Level II to Level I. In the replication study, 17% of students remained at Level I, 36% remained at Level II, 19% moved from Level II to Level III, 15% moved from Level I to Level II or Level III, and 13% dropped from Level II to Level I.
Complete MAT scores (i.e., prior to and one full year after participation) were available for 183 of the 235 students. Prior to participating in Failure Free, 91% of students were performing at the lowest MAT level (i.e., Reteach), 9% at the higher Practice level and 0% at the Apply level. After one year, more than half the students showed higher levels of performance: 34% at the Reteach level, 42% at the Practice level and 24% at the Apply level.

2. An independent study was conducted with 88 students in grades 1-3 at a single school (Slate, Algozzine & Lockavitch, 1998). The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) was used to determine both pre- and post-program scores. Students were administered a 10-item silent reading screening test and a 30-item word-recognition measure. Their attitudes toward reading were measured using a scale from negative to positive.
Pre- and post-program ITBS scores showed the following results:
(a) 1st-grade student scores showed a significant increase (NCE of 31.63, no pretest NCE was provided)
(b) 2nd-grade students showed a significant decrease in scores, a drop of 21.37 NCEs
(c) 3rd-grade students showed a significant increase, a gain of 17.96 NCEs
(d) On no other post-test measure for ITBS or Failure Free assessments did the three grades differ statistically.
On the Failure Free word recognition test, students recognized an average of 13.5 more words out of a possible 30 measure at the end of the program.
On the Failure Free silent reading test, students answered more questions correctly (on average, 4.24 questions out of a possible 10) at the end of the program than at the beginning.
Student attitude measures were unrelated to their achievement at the beginning and end of the program; however, teachers' views of student attitudes were statistically related to students' achievement. That is, students who achieved at higher rates were viewed by teachers as having more positive attitudes toward

reading.

3. In another study, about 70 1st-3rd graders identified as at risk for reading failure participated in the Failure Free Reading Program (Slate, Lockavitch and Algozzine, 1998). Students were pretested and post-tested on the ITBS. Pretest scores indicated reading performance significantly below expected levels (below the 10th percentile). Student attitudes toward reading were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The study showed the following results:
Significant improvements were evident in word recognition after participation in the Failure Free program. The average number of words read correctly on the post-test (M = 24.66, SD = 6.99) was more than twice that read on the pretest (M=10.40, SD = 10.01).
Significant improvements were evident on silent reading, as well, with comprehension scores almost doubling from the pretest (M=4.57, SD = 2.09) to the posttest (M=9.30, SD = 1.52).
Student attitudes did not show a statistical difference, but surveys indicated that teachers believed their students' attitudes improved.

4. A 1998 study (Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch and Algozzine) examined the impact of Failure Free Reading on 39 students with severe reading problems. Students were selected randomly from the lowest reading groups (two or more years below grade level) in several elementary schools and taught word recognition and comprehension skills using Failure Free Reading. Students' ability was measured by the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R), and their reading achievement was measured using the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement. The discrepancy measured the difference between students' ability (WISC-R) and their achievement (WJ) scores for pretest and post-test. The study showed the following results:
Average grade equivalent improvement of 9-18 months was evident in post-test reading ability scores. Comprehension skills, for example, improved 1.5 grade levels.
Comparisons of pretest post-test standard score improvement were significant on each Woodcock-Johnson reading subtest: letter word identification improved 10 points (14%), word attack improved nine points (11%), comprehension improved 13 points (17%).
Discrepancies between intellectual ability (WISC-R) and reading achievement (WJ) decreased in more than half of the students in all areas tested. Pretests indicated that 67% of the students had severe discrepancies between ability and achievement; post-tests indicated that only 31% of students still showed severe discrepancies.
A replication study with 60 students showed similar results. Four Woodcock-Johnson reading subtests were used, including: letter word identification, word attack, comprehension and dictation. Only dictation scores did not show a significant improvement. Average grade equivalent improvement was 9-18 months.

5. Fifty-eight 3rd- and 4th-grade students in two suburban schools used Failure Free to supplement instruction for the school year (Lockavitch and Algozzine, 1998). Students identified by teachers as failing in reading performance (i.e., lowest 10%) were randomly selected from six classes, with the remainder of failing students serving as the control group. Students were administered a 10-item silent reading screening test to assess reading comprehension, as well as a 30-item word-recognition measure. Their attitudes toward reading were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The study showed the following results:
Pretest word recognition scores were similar for Failure Free and control-group students. Post-test word recognition scores improved for both groups, but far greater for the Failure Free group (90% compared to 35%). The developer notes that the Failure Free students had systematic exposure to the words being tested, while the control students did not.
Pretest silent reading scores also were similar for Failure Free and control-group students. Post-test scores indicated significant gains for Failure Free students, while reading scores did not change for the control group. Once again, the developer notes that the Failure Free students were reading familiar passages, while the control group was not.
No significant change was seen in student attitudes toward reading, but their teachers reported improvement in student attitudes.

6. In another study, 1st-grade students (n=165), identified by their teachers as at risk of serious reading problems used Failure Free Reading to supplement instruction for eight months (Algozzine, Lockavitch

and Audette, 1997). Pretest scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) indicated below-average performance on oral, silent reading and word recognition subtests. The study showed the following results:
All subtest scores showed significant gains on the post-tests.
Pretest scores indicated that 45% of students scored at the pre-primer level, 45% at the primer level and 10% at the 1st-grade level.
Post-test scores showed that 13% of students remained at the pre-primer or primer level, 52% of students scored at the 1st-grade level, and 35% of students scored at the 2nd-grade level.

In addition to the above evaluations, several schools involved in Failure Free have submitted data to the developer, which is available upon request.

Impact on Teaching
Surveys consistently show that teachers believe their students' attitudes toward reading improve significantly. Teachers also show increased expectations of their students who participate in Failure Free.

Professional Development and Support:

Initial training sessions last from a minimum of three hours to one day. The sessions cover the following topics:
Overview of Failure Free Reading's philosophy and rationale
Critical research facts about and characteristics of the targeted student population, as well as instructional elements crucial for a student's success
Implementation of materials
Using the methodology in the classroom with all students and as a complement to other reading programs.

Failure Free trainers come to the school or district to provide onsite training. Full- and part-time trainers are available in most regions of the country. After the onsite training, Failure Free provides ongoing technical assistance and instructional assistance ranging from onsite visits to a "1-800" telephone service, CD-ROM and instructional videos. The developer is planning to add newsletters, online chat rooms and long-distance video conferences.

Implementation:

Failure Free is designed to be implemented in schools with large numbers of at-risk and special education students, limited staff training time, noncertified teachers and teaching assistants, and limited financial resources. As with any program, Failure Free is likely to be more successful in schools with strong, stable instructional leadership and with teachers who are committed to high expectations, positive change and excellence.

Failure Free can be adopted by individual teachers, teachers across grade levels or throughout a whole school or district.

Costs:

The cost of implementing Failure Free ranges from $5,000-$50,000, with the average cost around $10,000. Schools pay a one-time fee that covers initial training (excluding travel and expenses) and the minimum amount of materials (combination of print and software). The cost depends on the number of students involved and the extent to which the program is implemented.

Considerations:

Failure Free Reading is designed for students with the greatest reading difficulties and has not been as effective with students who score above the 20th percentile on reading or other standardized tests.

Most of the studies were conducted by the developer, and some do not include comparison or control groups. In the near future, the developer plans to conduct a large-scale, longitudinal, independent evaluation of the effects of Failure Free Reading.

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Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate reading programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular reading programs for districts and schools to use?
How can a reading program's track record be checked and validated?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various reading programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh the benefits of a reading program versus its cost and required resources? Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help all students read successfully?

Resources:
Algozzine, B.; Lockavitch, J.F.; and Audette, R. (1997). "Implementing Failure Free Reading with Students Seriously at Risk for Failure." *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1997.

Lockavitch, J., and Algozzine, B. (1998). "Effects of Intensive Intervention on Students at Risk for Reading Failure." *Florida Reading Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 2, December 1998.

Lockavitch, J.F.; Morgan, L.; and Algozzine, B. (1999). "Accelerating the Growth Curve: Improving Opportunities for Children at Risk of Reading Failure." *Proven Practice*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1999.

Rankhorn, B.; England, G.; Collins, S.M.; Lockavitch, J.F.; and Algozzine, B. (1998). "Effects of Failure Free Reading Program on Students with Severe Reading Disabilities." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, vol. 31, pp. 307-312.

Slate, J.R.; Algozzine, B.; and Lockavitch, J.F. (1998). "Effects of Intensive Remedial Reading Instruction." *Journal of At-Risk Issues*, vol. 5, no. 1, Summer Fall 1998.

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